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Hobsbawm in Trinidad: understanding contemporary modalities of urban violence

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ABSTRACT

Eric Hobsbawm's milestone work *Bandits* is attentive to the rural poor and situates social banditry within the world of peasant resistance, but his concepts are surprisingly adaptable to contemporary urban settings. Drawing on Hobsbawm's conceptualisation of social banditry and avengers, this article examines the perspective of gangs who perceive themselves as victims of inequality, poverty and capitalism; who serve as social actors and security providers for their communities; and who at the same time engage in cruelty and high levels of violence and terror. This qualitative study is based on fieldwork undertaken in Trinidad and Tobago. Findings show that Hobsbawm's figure of the avenger contributes to a better understanding of the contemporary modalities of urban violence and helps unpacking and characterise the ambiguity of the relationship between gangs and local communities.

KEYWORDS

Caribbean; urban violence; security; qualitative study; gangs

Introduction

Eric Hobsbawm's 1969 milestone work is attentive to the rural poor and situates social banditry within the world of peasant resistance, but his concepts are surprisingly adaptable to urban settings. Urban violence represents one of the most significant security challenges for citizens and governments. Security challenges in cities are complex, and range from organised crime to political and economic unrest. Latin America and the Caribbean have the highest rates of violence worldwide.¹ Many growing cities in Latin America and the Caribbean are witnessing a sharp escalation of various forms of urban violence and some cities have lost control of parts of their territory to non-state violent actors such as street gangs, drug lords or armed groups. By wielding extra-legal power these groups create a parallel structure of social norms and law and order. Low-income neighbourhoods often referred to as favelas, barrios, slums, no go-zones or hot spots are often the arena of urban violence related to criminal gangs. Gangs commonly occupy these 'uncontrolled spaces of a "world of slums"' and have become 'permanent fixtures in many ghettos, barrios, and favelas across the globe'.² The relationship of gangs and their local communities is an ambiguous one as local residents face a high level of everyday violence, fear and insecurity, yet a number of scholars found an intimate relationship based on the provision of protection, social services, jobs and financial support. The relationship between gangs and the community

within which they operate drew the attention of scholars, resulting in numerous studies highlighting the fundamental ambiguity of this relationship.³ It is understood that gangs are frequently intimately related to politics and take over social roles in their communities. The social roles that gangs take over are not necessarily emerging due to a void or lack of state presence, but rather in 'state complicity'⁴ or in 'co-existence'⁵ with state authority and 'generating localized systems of order'.⁶ Thus gangs are not 'unchangeably violent or terminally hostile'⁷ but can constitute 'guarantors of local security',⁸ 'orders of violence',⁹ and 'recognizable social institutions that obeyed and imposed codified rules',¹⁰ employing a system referred to as 'jungle justice'.¹¹ Brotherton and Barrios find that 'the possibility of gangs emerging with their own alternative political, economic, or even cultural agenda is never given serious consideration'.¹²

Taking the case of urban violence in Trinidad and Tobago, this article sheds light on the interactive sphere between gangs¹³ and the community they reign. In Trinidad and Tobago, a state with 1.3 million inhabitants, the homicide rate increased significantly from 9.5 per 100,000 in 2000 to 41.6 per 100,000 in 2008.¹⁴ The national homicide rate has decreased since then, but remains the world's sixth-highest (homicide rate 30.9 per 100,000 in 2015).¹⁵ While not all murders are gang-related, gangs play a major role in pushing the level of homicide and violence. A gang war between two major groups, namely 'Rasta City' and the 'Muslims', has pushed up the homicide rates and spread fear. Violence and gang activity is a nationwide phenomenon, yet mainly found on the island of Trinidad and concentrated in the north-western part of the island where the capital city Port of Spain is located. More specifically, violence and gang activity is concentrated in the area of Laventille and its adjacent neighbourhoods of Morvant, Beetham and Sealots along the east west corridor, which connects the capital city with the rest of the island. The Besson Street police station, which is in charge of East Port-of-Spain and Laventille, accounted for 23.8 per cent of all murders in Trinidad and Tobago in 2005, pushing the Laventille's homicide rate to 249 per 100,000 persons.¹⁶ The gangs have created unofficial borders for the geographical zones they control and have restricted freedom of movement for both regular citizens and gang members. The gangs secure their borders through snipers with high-power assault rifles, who are located at designated observation points. Invisible to outsiders, gang territory begins close to the capital city's major shopping street and main bus station. They are also involved in drug trafficking, burglaries, robberies, prostitution, fraud, and extortion created their own legal companies and non-governmental organisations, receiving government contracts and dispense jobs related to the social welfare programmes.

Urban violence has caught scholarly attention and poses a preoccupation of policy-makers, planners and practitioners around the world.¹⁷ Within interdisciplinary scholarly literature as well as policy-makers and non-state initiatives, there is a recurring challenge of how to limit, contain or prevent gang violence. Most commonly, public authorities, including police, national security agencies and special forces, as well as mainstream sociological and criminological studies focus on youths' deviant behaviour with a tendency to brand gangs as national security threat or 'new urban insurgency'¹⁸ or 'crime and security problem'.¹⁹ In this scenario, states commonly address the issue of gangs by using increasingly punitive measures, based on the criminalisation of youth and the poor, and a militarisation of public

space.²⁰ As part of this reactionary discourse, repressive policy responses have proven to be ineffective or even counterproductive in many cases as they push youth towards more organised forms of criminality.²¹ Thus, scholars criticise that gangs are commonly misunderstood feature of urban life.²² Positive activities and social roles of gangs remain an ‘unappreciated’ aspect in scholarly literature and, despite numerous case studies, have not ‘found a home in the dominant strands of criminological thinking about gangs’.²³ There is a need for a multifaceted perspective on gangs, as their sole criminalisation is ‘intellectually dishonest and socio-logically baseless’.²⁴

This article takes Eric Hobsbawm’s notion of social banditry as a referential starting point to discuss contemporary modalities of gangs, banditry and violence in Trinidad and Tobago. The image of the social bandit, most commonly personified as Robin Hood, has proven remarkably persistent. The longevity and popularity to use the concept of Robin Hood is evidenced by several recent studies to explain contemporary violence and urban gangs.²⁵ Framing the ‘anti-hero’ as Robin Hoods explains their attachment to society and sheds light on the mechanism that enables audiences to take the gangs’ side to become complicit with them.²⁶ In a similar manner, Gutiérrez Rivera argues that the community status of gangs has important implications: the closer the link between community residents and gangs, the higher the chances that residents tolerate gang violence.²⁷ While acknowledging the usefulness of the concept of Robin Hoods, I find that the figure of Hobsbawm’s *avenger* has even greater potential to explain the multifaceted phenomenon of gang violence as it combines two contradicting perspectives on gangs: as caring social actors and violent actors or fear and terror at the same time. The conceptual combination of these contradicting perspectives is a novelty.

Drawing on Hobsbawm’s conceptualisation of avengers, this article examines the perspective of gangs who perceive themselves as both products and victims of capitalism, especially of inequality and poverty, and as social actors and providers for their communities, and who engage in cruelty and high levels of violence, through which they create fear. The conceptualisation of Hobsbawm’s avenger is surprisingly adaptable to contemporary urban settings as it goes beyond the image of the Robin Hood to explain and characterise the ambiguity of the relationship between gangs and local communities. To this end the concept of the avenger facilitates a holistic understanding of gangs, and, to this end, presents alternative viewpoint how to understand and deal with contemporary urban violence.

The article proceeds in three parts. In the first, I outline the role of gangs in local communities drawing on scholarly findings from across the world. These findings, from political science, sociology and ethnographic studies show the ambiguity of the relationship of gangs and their local communities. I subsequently theorise this ambiguity by presenting Hobsbawm’s figure of the avenger and present my methodological approach. The second part mirrors the narratives of gang leaders and members and local residents from gang-controlled areas concerning the role of gangs as social actors, security providers, and defenders of the community against injustice and social neglect. The third part outlines the character of brutality, cruelty and high levels of violence, through which gangs create fear.

Urban violence

Latin America and Caribbean have the highest homicide rate in the world.²⁸ Urban violence is becoming more widespread in Latin American and Caribbean cities,²⁹ which face a 'chronic public security crisis'.³⁰ Examining scholars' findings across the world, gangs pose a threat of insecurity and violence, yet the relationship to their local communities are ambiguous, intimate, symbiotic and based on reciprocal trust, coercion and compliance. Low-income neighbourhoods, often referred to as favelas, barrios, slums, no go-zones or hot spots are often the arena of urban violence related to criminal gangs. According to Rodgers and Baird, the relationship between gangs and communities is 'often very strong and highly organized'.³¹ The relationship of gangs and their local communities is an ambiguous one as local residents face a high level of everyday violence, fear and insecurity, yet a number of scholars found an intimate relationship based on the provision of protection, social services, jobs and financial support. Gangs constitute a real yet misunderstood feature of urban violence, as they are closely linked to increasing levels of inequality and exclusion in Central America.³² Inequality and exclusion play a major role in nurturing opinions to generate legitimacy and support. Griffin and Persad observe that 'un-civil society groups' have emerged throughout the Caribbean due to 'a failure of the state to deliver on its core functions – providing a consistent set of public goods, including security, education, care, and basic infrastructure needs'.³³ Gangs take the opportunity to provide these services and in turn become legitimated 'community leaders'³⁴ or even 'functional equivalents of states'.³⁵ This is in line with what Harriot observes in Jamaica: the relationship with the community gives the gangs political leverage and immunity against law enforcement.³⁶ Gang leaders in Jamaica, referred to as dons, rely on a significant level of support of their community members which is based on the dons' provision of social security, physical protection and employment and an 'alternative form of dispensing justice'.³⁷ Dons provide food, school supplies and gifts and, unsurprisingly explains Jaffe, present themselves as 'benevolent providers and protectors'.³⁸ Dons perform 'social and economic welfare roles' which in turn grants them authority among community residents.³⁹ Criminal gangs in Jamaica used profits made through narcotic trade to provide socio-economic services to community members.⁴⁰ The roles that dons take over are not necessarily emerging due to a void or lack of state presence, rather in 'state complicity'.⁴¹ Similarly, Stephenson analysed the local social order of gangs in Russia and observed that in the 1990s, gangs turned into 'agents of patrimonial power, acting as a structure of quasi-familial welfare and violent regulation' in their area.⁴² Local poor residents received financial support, hungry people were handed free potatoes, and play areas for children were set up.⁴³ The Russian gang leader, as Stephenson describes, invested in halting street crime and developed good relations to the police. Stephenson noticed a 'gang's penetration into the community' and a self-perception of gangs themselves as 'bastions of order and morality'.⁴⁴ Community members accepted the gangs as violent social regulators due to a lack of trust in effective state protection and distrust in institutions of law and order.⁴⁵ In South-East Asia's well-known tourist island, Bali, militia groups contest security and enjoy legitimacy at the local level in reference to the 'community in need of protection and its core values'.⁴⁶ McDonald and Wilson

argue that the power of Balinese militia rule and their security provision doesn't indicate a limitation of state authority due to the strong embedment in the local Balinese culture and linkages to political sphere.⁴⁷ The protective role that violent groups play contributes to an ambiguity in people's attitudes towards them, as McIlwaine and Moser observed throughout Latin America.⁴⁸ Gutiérrez Rivera found that in the 1990s local communities in Honduras controlled by the gangs MS and M-18 didn't perceive them as threats, but as 'forms of protection, from burglars, delinquents, and other threats'.⁴⁹ The 1990 Nicaraguan youth gangs, known as *pandilla*, were 'recognizable social institutions that obeyed and imposed codified rules' as Rodgers explains, and refrained from harming local community residents.⁵⁰ Gangs have also taken over roles as justice providers by enacting rules, prosecuting crimes and sentencing according to their own view of life. Blake finds that gangs in Jamaica became judge, juror and executor of justice at the same time, employing what he calls 'jungle justice'.⁵¹ Jungle justice prohibits, for instance, robberies in their own communities, disrespecting the elderly and sexual abuse of the women living in the community. This is what Hensell found in the case of street gangs in Albania's urban centres. Gangs were in search of public recognition and appreciation, and felt responsible to maintain law and order against the backdrop of a corrupt and incapacitating government. They imposed their own rules such urging gang members to refrain from sexual assaults of women and theft in their communities.⁵²

Yet, many cases around the world indicate the use of violence of gangs as a strategic means. Siegelberg and Hensell frame social orders which are based on the use or threat of physical violence exerted by violent groups as 'order of violence'.⁵³ Blake points out that Jamaican *dons* gained significant power based on the command of armed gangs willing to use their guns, which is a 'means of creating fear and acquiring respect inside garrisons'.⁵⁴ In this way gang leaders build a relationship with the residents of their garrisons based on reciprocal trust: *dons* provide welfare benefits to community members who in return afford legitimacy and authority.⁵⁵ In the case of Honduras, gangs increased their use of violence to maintain their 'legitimate community status,' as Gutiérrez Rivera observed, by threatening, mugging and extorting residents, non-residents and taxi and bus drivers.⁵⁶

Scholarly literature has so far failed to theorise the ambiguity the two faces of gangs: as caring social actors *and* as instigators of cruelty and actors of excessive violence and terror. These examples from all over the world call for a thorough examination of the relationship, but has not resulted in a conceptualisation thereof. Eric Hobsbawm offers a means of addressing this contradiction by introducing the character of the avenger. Although his work on social banditry has been criticised as romanticising crime and as 'methodologically unsound, theoretically flawed, empirically limited',⁵⁷ it stimulates thinking of gangs as exercising urban social banditry.

The term 'banditry' denotes challenging the economic, social and political order by challenging those power.⁵⁸ Banditry is thus a phenomenon linked to socio-economic and political orders, as banditry is enacted by 'outlaws' who act outside of public law and not as law enforcers. In general social bandits are 'peasant outlaws whom the lord and state regard as criminals, but who remain within the peasant society, and are considered by their people as heroes, as champions, avengers, fighters for justice'.⁵⁹ He defines bandits as persons who 'resist obedience, are outside the range of power, are

potential exercisers of power themselves, and therefore potential rebels'.⁶⁰ Bandits thus voice public discontent in the form of peasant protest and rebellion.

Hobsbawm outlines several types of social bandits, among which are the noble robber and the avenger. I will briefly introduce the type of a noble robber before I continue with the avenger. Noble robbers, framed as Robin Hoods, start as 'victims of what they and their neighbours feel to be injustice'.⁶¹ A noble robber acts as an agent 'of justice, indeed a restorer of morality, and often considers himself as such'.⁶² The role of a noble robber is that of 'a champion, the righter of wrongs, the bringer of justice and social equity'.⁶³ The beginnings of a noble robber are linked to the perception of injustice, which is an important aspect of gangs as well. Hobsbawm outlines nine characteristics of noble robbers: noble robbers are (1) engaged in 'outlawry' as victims of injustice, but considered criminals by authorities. A noble robber (2) 'rights wrongs' and (3) takes from the rich to provide for the poor. A noble robber (4) only engages in killings in self-defence and revenge, (5) is attached to his community, and (6) is 'admired, helped and supported' by the community. Noble robbers (7) only die if betrayed, because the community members would not help the authorities against them, (8) are theoretically 'invisible and invulnerable' and (9) do not oppose the highest political leaders but those who directly oppress them.⁶⁴

Clearly, noble robbers are portrayed as good, morally just and heroic in nature. In reality, this one-sided portray is difficult to substantiate, as gang members use violence strategically to pursue a certain goal. The aspects of revenge and retaliation, terror, cruelty and indiscriminate brutality seem to be absent in Hobsbawm's notion of a noble robber. But he introduces another type of criminal: the avenger. The avenger shares many characteristics of the noble robber, but in addition 'avengers' are not solely genuine righters of wrongs in the battle against injustice in the name of the oppressed, but also build their power by creating fear and horror. Hobsbawm cites a poem to shed light on the image of an avenger:

*He killed for play, Out of pure perversity, And gave food to the hungry, With love and charity.*⁶⁵

The character of the avenger is highly interesting. The avenger combines the positive aspects of noble robbers with brutality, fear and power: 'terror and cruelty' are 'part of their public image'.⁶⁶ Hobsbawm explains that avengers are 'public monsters' who internalise 'values of the "noble robber"' and are 'heroes not in spite of the fear and horror their actions inspire, but in some ways because of them'.⁶⁷ Excessive violence and cruelty are part of the character of an avenger, as they live by love and fear: if their roles were based only on love, it would be a weakness, and if it were based only on fear, they would have no supporters. 'Even the best of bandits must demonstrate that he can be "terrible"' and despite, or rather because of, the 'monstrosities' they 'are and remain the heroes of the local population'.⁶⁸ Hobsbawm thus highlights the mechanism behind the use of violence to spread fear. Upholding sexual morality and the punishment of rapists can be part of being an avenger, though imparting terror is the dominant attribute. In contrast to the beloved Robin Hoods, '(t)o be terrifying and pitiless is a more important attribute of this bandit than to be the friend of the poor'.⁶⁹

Hobsbawm's avenger offers an understanding of contemporary urban violence on two dimensions: On a macro level, rather than seeing (urban) violence as an indicator

of a state's inability to address issues of poverty, racism and exclusion, and link the benevolent attitude of gangs to a lack of state presence or inadequate state capacity, the concept of the avenger allows us to analyse the role that violence plays in contemporary democracies. As Arias has pointed out, gangs can generate popular support and become 'resistant to state policy interventions'.⁷⁰ Understanding gangs as avengers can thus offer valuable insights into the workings of politics, gangs and local communities and explain why the phenomenon of gangs is persistent over time. On a micro level, viewing the ambiguity of gangs as part of the processes of socialisation of young men into crime is also central to understanding why gangs persist. Instead of viewing gang members as pathological criminals, Hobsbawm's avenger helps to understand crime as a form of social protest and underclass revolt while at the same time refraining from romanticising crime and violence. Acknowledging gang members as victims of social exclusion, poverty and discrimination can serve as a self-fulfilling prophecy for young men, providing them with a legitimisation for opting for 'a life of crime.' But in reality, this is only one perspective on gangs, as scholar Hagedorn reminds to view gang members as 'real people' who react to 'conditions of poverty, racism and oppression' and at the same time urges not to romanticise or underestimate their violent and destructive potential.⁷¹

Allowing Hobsbawm's concepts to travel to Trinidad calls out for attention to two aspects that do not fit: the urban setting and gangs as social bandits. In Hobsbawm's understanding, social banditry was a rural phenomenon limited to peasant outlaws; he excludes urban terrorism, gangs or robbers whose motivations were only economic.⁷² He argues that rural and urban spheres are too different to be discussed in the same terms and even antagonistic, as 'peasant bandits, like most peasants, distrust and hate townsmen'.⁷³ In Hobsbawm's definition, gangs are not social bandits. But Hobsbawm also argues that 'in a peasant society few can be free' as peasants are 'victims of authority and coercion' who are oppressed by 'lordship and labour'.⁷⁴ In contemporary terminology, this can be translated to social exclusion, elitism and corruption, and capitalism. The empirical findings of this study underline that Hobsbawm's concepts are adaptable to today's urban settings and very useful to understand socially and economically excluded urban males resorting to violence and crime.

The following section applies Hobsbawm's concepts to Trinidad and Tobago as an analytical framework for understanding the relationship between gangs and their communities. I furthermore critically examine the data based on interviews with active gang members as gangs create narratives about themselves, a practice that gang researcher Brotherton refers to as 'myth-building'.⁷⁵ It is important to understand that the shared narratives are based on gang members self-perception or community members' perception of gangs.

Method

This research project is an interdisciplinary, explorative case study. The goal of a case study is to understand complex social phenomena and 'retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events'.⁷⁶ In this case study I used qualitative methods and a grounded theory approach.

The empirical data was gathered during fieldwork undertaken in Trinidad and Tobago from March to June 2015. In this study, interviews were conducted with a variety of persons, including active gang leaders and members. These interview partners are considered to be hard-to-reach. Researching hard-to-reach populations raises the question of which sampling technique to apply. Interview partners were selected with the use of a refined sampling technique, the successive approach.⁷⁷ It is influenced by the logic of snowball sampling and purposive sampling, methodological insights provided by researchers who have studied hard-to-reach population (e.g. accessibility difficulties, indefinite population), and the particularities of conflict environments (e.g. atmosphere of distrust and suspicion). The first step of the successive approach consists of identifying, mapping, and contacting individuals who work or live with the target population of interest. This entails purposive sampling, as researchers use their judgment to identify the individuals they think will provide the best insights. These individuals are similar to experts with context knowledge and are referred to as 'periphery persons.' When sampling periphery persons, it is preferable to generate a sample with diversity of the roles as the perceptions of the research phenomenon might differ depending on the person's role (e.g. whether they are a teacher, religious representative, or social worker). Thus I mapped out people who were working with or on gangs in Trinidad and contacted them. The second step of the successive approach involves contacting members of the hard-to-reach population, in this case active gang members.

Fieldwork and interviews

Carrying out fieldwork in dangerous settings has various implications, ranging from sampling and accessing the population of interest, shaping the research agenda, and formulating strategies on how to manage potential risks. Methodological issues that impact sampling and interview techniques are, for instance, a lack of accessibility, a lack of openness due to mistrust or security issues concerning the researcher. When interviewing active criminals, in contrast to former combatants or ex-members, establishing a rapport and trust with them is paramount; otherwise, the researcher's well-being is in jeopardy. Anthropologists, ethnographers, sociologists, and political scientists have all experienced the challenges of conducting qualitative research and the related hazards in dangerous settings. The resulting publications thereof have contributed to a growing body of literature, which covers 'dangerous fieldwork',⁷⁸ 'danger in the field'⁷⁹ and 'physical dangers to fieldworkers'.⁸⁰ Further valuable work based on qualitative gang research and research in highly violent settings has been published by, among others, Enrique Desmond Arias, Adam Baird, Luis Barrios, Philippe Bourgeois, David Brotherton, Vanda Felbab-Brown, Jennifer M. Hazen, Dennis Rodgers, Martin Sánchez-Jankowski, Gaëlle Rivard Piché and Sonja Wolf.⁸¹

With the use of the successive approach qualitative, semi-structured interviews and background talks with 39 persons were conducted. Interview partners included active leaders or members of gangs; former gang members, released prisoners, as well as teachers, social workers, youth workers, a pastor, a priest and an imam, youth church groups, musicians, regular community residents from gang-controlled areas, steelband players, former prison officers, police officers and special police unit officers. In

addition, I had off-the-record conversations with 18 persons (14 men; four women), including two former gang members. Additionally, I took part in several events in gang-controlled areas such as community meetings, walkabouts, bible study meetings, etc. and visited a maximum-security prison. The interviews were recorded, transcribed with the computer programme F5 and coded openly and analysed with the help of the computer programme Atlas.ti.

Gangs in Trinidad and Tobago: caring defenders of the community

The first violent groups emerged in the area of Laventille, an area with a long and complex history of violence. Laventille is the area of origin of the steel pan music. The steelband era was marked by outbursts of violence and street fights, underlining the argument that it 'always had gang violence in Trinidad'.⁸² Fights between steelbands flourished in the 1950s that took place in the streets, backyards and alleyways at any point in time.⁸³ In the 1980s the youth of Laventille was easy prey for the mobilisation efforts of an Islamic organisation named Jamaat al Muslimeen. In the late 1980s an increasing number of youth joined under the wing of the Jamaat al Muslimeen, which went from an Islamic community organisation to 'social bandits' to the providers of guns and protectors of the drug trade as 'Allah's outlaws'.⁸⁴ After the attempted *coup d'état* in July 1990, the Jamaat al Muslimeen withdrew officially from their activities in Laventille and gradually lost control to individual kingpins. The following decade in the mid-2000s was marked by a fierce competition between persons who sought to become the next powerful gang leader. The competition eventually led to the consolidation of the two factions around 2008–2012, 'the Muslims' and their counterforce 'Rasta City', who split up vast gang territory among themselves. 'Rasta City' and 'the Muslims' have hence become umbrella groups with a hierarchical leadership and tremendous influence.

In Trinidad and Tobago, gangs' power is bolstered by their social role as defenders and voicers of public discontent in their community. According to my interviewees, gang members perceive themselves as victims of a political system ruled by greedy, power-hungry and corrupt politicians in their country, as well as victims of global mechanisms of inequality where capitalist countries and 'black-minded' world leaders enrich themselves at the expenses of the rest. This self-perception as deprived victims has become a convenient life motto which they live up to. According to this mindset, the gang members' actions are a response to the status quo; they are the freedom fighters of the oppressed and the Robin Hoods of the poor, under the flag of anti-capitalism and equality.

*We are defending ourselves. They provoke everyday, we can't take that.*⁸⁵

Through the lens of Hobsbawm this mindset is part of a noble robber who 'never kills but in self-defence or just revenge'.⁸⁶ The gang members and leaders interviewed emphasised their frustration and disappointment to justify their actions. They based their criticism on global issues such as world domination, capitalism, and imperialism, as well as on local issues such as corrupt and unaccountable politicians. The perception of injustice can be traced back to the country's resource wealth, which is not shared equally among the country's citizens but remains in the hands of a few. A leader of

Rasta City explained that Trinidad and Tobago is a rich country, but that the wealth is not distributed equally. Therefore, not everybody profits from the country's oil. While certain segments of the society live in affluence, others are deprived of basic needs such as sanitary infrastructure. The gang leader recounted how he grew up in Laventille's widespread poverty and accused rich Trinidadians of stealing from society to 'get themselves rich', stating that 'the rich people need to share some of the money'.⁸⁷

*We live here in Laventille and we still have people living without toilets, [they only have] shit holes, latrines [...] plenty latrines around here. And now the government come try to fix it, but they could have done it long time ago, but they hold on to the money. You know they thief [steal]! Everybody thieving this country! I really don't know what they are doing with the money, I can't say. All I know they [their] house big, and the family have everything.*⁸⁸

Another gang leader from Beetham Gardens stated that theoretically there is enough work for every citizen in Trinidad and Tobago. He argued that certain parts of the society are purposefully kept in dependency in order to control them, stating that the economic deprivation is a purposefully orchestrated move to 'keep the people poor' in order to facilitate politicians' own social mobility who live on the expense of the population.⁸⁹ The gang leader's statement is a clear example of how well Hobsbawm's peasant society resembles the contemporary urban poor: 'in a peasant society few can be free' as peasants are 'victims of authority and coercion' who are oppressed by 'lordship and labour'.⁹⁰

Voting, the gang leader continued, the means to enforce political change, is 'all lies'.⁹¹ Another gang member felt that the government of Trinidad and Tobago must profit in some way from the ongoing violence, since it is not doing what is necessary to stop it. In his view, the violence between the two rival gangs Rasta City and the Muslims could easily be solved, but 'the government like [sic] the crime'.⁹² According to a gang leader's perception, crime could be easily contained because it is a product of poverty. Less poverty would mean less crime, so the gang member called for proper education, enough food and decent work for the people in order to enable them to leave the life of crime.⁹³ According to regular community members living in Laventille as well as gang members election promises are not being delivered. This perception of political neglect is framed as the reason for the problems in the communities. Places like Laventille 'have lots of love' but the violence and killings take place because of the political neglect, as a gang leader from Beetham Gardens explained:

*With the violence and the killings [...] it have this kind of way [...] but it come down to one thing: The political figures in the country is not dealing with we [us]! And that's what's going on.*⁹⁴

Statements made by gang leaders show traits of anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism, as evident in one interviewee's comments. He criticised the lack of legitimacy of 'world leaders', asking 'who give them the power to dominate the world?' He also stated that some local politicians don't have Trinidad and Tobago but rather the 'dollar sign' in their hearts. In interviewed gang members' own perception, their communities are the victims of world dominance, and 'evil men' who keep the people purposefully blinded, trembling and fighting rule the world. He argued that the voices of the people are only heard when they become violent.⁹⁵ He accused the 'world leaders' of 'lock[ing] the world resources' in order to be able to control the people. To this end, he touched on

the issue of a revolution, as ‘people are fed up’ and ready to claim their share. Another leader from the hills of Laventille put the existence of gangs into perspective. He argued that there are poor people in every society of the world, the ‘have and the have-nots’, and that the poorest people of society take up their arms as a struggle for survival.⁹⁶ He made implicit references to the evident inequality in his country:

*Poor men have no plane, poor men have no villa, but they have guns and struggle for survival.*⁹⁷

An elderly resident from Beetham supports this perspective:

*The wealth trickle down [...] although we are a oil-producing country, gas-producing country, the oil and gas money, it will filter down to us. The Trinidadian government cream off a large amount and then they trickle down some [money] to the middle class and then the crumbs to us. Everybody keep grabbing.*⁹⁸

The perception of injustice incorporates the argument that violence is a means of self-defence. Therefore, gangs offer the service of protection, often framed as self-defence against enemy gangs. Reportedly, the community has to stand up against the destruction of property and robberies of jewellery. Violent actions thus become a reaction to provocations, crime and violence, a perspective which frames those carrying out this violence as the victims rather than perpetrators. A gang member described this as follows:

*And the people from up there [neighbourhood called Block8] coming down here [St. Paul Street], they break the place, they take people[s] gold, that start a lot of war, nah! So now people in the community now stand up against that. These people have no respect for nobody. They come here, they break my mother's place, they break your mother's place. They take my chain [necklace], they take your chain, and go back over. They come and do that. They come and take whatever, they don't care. We are defending ourselves.*⁹⁹

The gang members legitimate violence by vengeance, and Hobsbawm explains that for avengers ‘cruelty is inseparable from vengeance, and vengeance is an entirely legitimate activity for the noblest of bandits’.¹⁰⁰

The position of a gang leader is referred to as a community leader and involves responsibilities, including the provision of protection for the community.¹⁰¹ Therefore, only persons who appear eligible may hold this respected position:

*Nobody perfect, everybody has good and bad. But here you have to defend yourself, you understand? And as a leader, you have to defend the community. But other people don't understand that. They just want to see it their way, just say ‘ah he killing people.’*¹⁰²

There are accounts of gangs as law enforcers and crime prosecutors and how they ‘don’t tolerate’ crimes in their communities, which has led to communities with few incidents of ‘snatching’ (stealing of valuables).¹⁰³ When gangs engage in ‘law enforcement’ they refer to their own rules, regulations, and punishments. In Hobsbawm’s vocabulary, they ‘right wrongs’.¹⁰⁴ Protecting their community means ensuring that community members aren’t robbed of their valuables (‘snatching’), physically hurt or sexually assaulted. According to gang members’ own accounts, their chances of finding the thieves or perpetrators of crime in their respective community are high.¹⁰⁵ A steel band manager who grew up in one of the most violent parts of town reported that perpetrators of crime could be killed by gang leaders for their offences:

*A young fella in the community who snatching chains [stealing necklaces] and doing that kind of things, he could get killed by a gang leader. The gang leader will get one of his boys to take him out [kill him].*¹⁰⁶

Besides prosecuting the crime, the leader also acts as the judge for punishments, which apparently range from no repercussions, to beatings, to death for rapists. The punishment depends on the severity of the crime, or the gang leader's mood, as one leader explained:

*Sometimes I beat them up, but not this time. But rapists get killed.*¹⁰⁷

Hobsbawm's avenger also perceives themselves as 'upholders of sexual morality'; bandits were forbidden to rape and seducers faced castration.¹⁰⁸

That the gangs have grown into social actors is apparent in the services they provide. In providing these services, the gangs have seized an important role within their communities, as a resident from gang-controlled Duncan Street in East Port of Spain claimed. He thinks that the groups have 'filled the void' left by the leaders of society.

*So the void and the gap that has been left, somebody will fill it! And right now the person who is filling the void that the leaders of society and politicians have left in these areas, are the gangsters! The head of the gang is filling it by giving people money for foods, clothes [...] at the end of the day when people leave the church they go home hungry without money and the gangster might give them food and money! What do you want people to do? This is the reality!*¹⁰⁹

The gangs provide what would be considered social welfare to the poor and financially deprived people. To gather deeper insights into the roles of gangs I asked a person from the Citizen Security Programme, who has also been working as a social worker with underprivileged youth in Trinidad and Tobago for years, if the gangs in Trinidad were indeed informal support systems. He answered:

*Definitely. They take over financial roles. They assist single mothers with groceries and assist the kids going to schools, buying uniforms, buying books and so on.*¹¹⁰

In this way, Trinidad's gangs have managed to take hold of an important niche between the community and the state as providers for the community. A leader of Rasta City explained that helping poor people and providing food for hungry people is his joy. He also explained that he is working on getting a teacher with lots of patience for the slow learners to give them a chance to succeed academically. Besides organising classes for the slow learners, he wants cooking classes in the community centre. He also wants the police to assist him in getting the youth out of the 'life of crime'.¹¹¹ Benevolently he claimed that in times when he has no money himself he sells his jewellery in order to be able to send people to the doctor.¹¹² Yet, an elderly resident from the Beetham stated that the gangs 'cream off' the lucrative profits made, leaving little to trickle down to the poor people of the area.¹¹³

While some reports on the positive role are self-ascribed attributes from gang members themselves, there were several occasions that exemplified their positive role to me as an observer. For instance the proclaimed role of gang leaders as protectors and crime prosecutors was also exemplified when a young woman interrupted my interview that I conducted at that time with a number of gang members. Tearing up she told the

gang leader that her necklace has just been snatched (stolen), an incident which left visible bleeding scratches on her neckline. The gang leader sent out his soldiers to ask around and dig up the thieves while he reassured me that the chances of finding the thieves are high, while 'the police has no chance'.¹¹⁴ They found the thieves in less than one hour.

The question of gangs as providers of security remains an ambiguous one. When I interviewed a mother of two who lives in the gang-controlled area called Beetham Gardens, she took a critical stand against the gang culture in her community in general, but argued that it has become safer *within her own* community, Beetham. She compared the community of Beetham to a 'social club' she is a member of, and members are provided with protection.

*But despite all the negative it also have a positive. In this community [Beetham] you are gonna be taken care of! You are safe. So my family members from Beetham. But if you are a stranger, they [gangs] are going to look at you and wanting to know who you are, what community you come from, you understand, that kind of thing? So now it's like a social club, like you belong to a certain club and once you are a member of that club, you are invited.*¹¹⁵

A few days later I interviewed an elderly resident in the community of Beetham. I asked him if the Beetham gangs provide anything positive to the community. He said:

*Indirectly, yeah. They tell you 'we have to protect all you' but that's about it!*¹¹⁶

Gangs as actors of violence, terror and fear

Eric Hobsbawm explains that 'avengers' are not solely genuine righters of wrongs in the battle against injustice in the name of the oppressed but also build their power by creating fear and horror. The following section highlights the excessive violence and cruelty are part of the character of an avenger who live by love and fear and whose dominant attribute it imparting terror. Hobsbawm argues that bandits, in this case gangsters, must demonstrate that they can be 'terrible' to remain the heroes of the local population.¹¹⁷

In the case of Trinidad and Tobago, gangs have succeeded in manifesting themselves as indispensable actors in society through the effective threat of violence and the proliferation of fear and terror. A community activist pointed out that the groups in Trinidad can be 'vicious', 'morbid' and 'monsters'.¹¹⁸ Reportedly gang began to use violence strategically to maintain power and respect when they 'got smart' and understood the effectiveness of threats.¹¹⁹ The level of violence in connection to gangs in Trinidad and Tobago is indeed very high. Shootings and drive-by shootings are the most common form of violence carried out by gangs in Trinidad and Tobago.¹²⁰ Gangs in Trinidad and Tobago have access to weapons ranging from pistols, rifles, rudimentary arms (crude guns made by artisans) and shotguns to fully automatic shotguns, semi-automatic rifles, sub-machine guns and assault rifles.¹²¹ The availability of arms, facilitated by the Jamaat al Muslimeen in the 1980s, established a mechanism which tremendously influenced gangs' increase in power: the youth realised 'the power of the gun', which brought them respect and fear.¹²²

*And let people realize the power of the gun. Let the youth control guns and realize what guns can do. How people respect them with guns.*¹²³

The groups institutionalised the strategic use of threats of violence for their own benefit, as they realised that ‘everybody is afraid of death’.¹²⁴ One reason why gangs opt for brutality is to cement their position and ‘prove their mark’ in the community, as a mother from Beetham Gardens observed.¹²⁵ Interview partners reported that the security situation has deteriorated to such an extent that political leaders are afraid to go into areas such as Laventille.¹²⁶ The symbiotic give and take of political patronage has thus shifted to a gridlock in which politicians have no choice but to deal with the gangs. To this end, gangs have made themselves ‘an indispensable component of campaigning’ through threats and the use of violence.¹²⁷ Besides drug trafficking, the gangs in Trinidad depend on government contracts and social work programmes (*Community-Based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme* (CEPEP) and the *Unemployment Relief Programme* (URP)) as resources. This source of income is fiercely defended. Police officers stated that the elimination of these social programmes would mean ‘revolts and violence’.¹²⁸ This is in line with what a resident from Beetham Gardens observed:

*[The gangs] control the ‘ten days’, CEPEP and URP. They control that. Within any government. Because all of them fear violence. So we are in a dread situation.*¹²⁹

Officers from the Besson Street police pointed out the paradox of handing out contracts and social work programmes to gang leaders, which enable them to finance the purchase of arms:

*The government hands them [gangs] a million-dollar project and they use the money to buy expensive guns that they use against us!*¹³⁰

The gangs use violence strategically to maintain power and respect, a typical characteristic of Hobsbawm’s avenger who are ‘exerters of power’.¹³¹ Gangs have become powerful and indispensable actors in their communities, and the politicians, as well as non-state agencies, have ‘virtually sold out to the gangs because of fear’.¹³² Reportedly, fear and terror is what they use to bargain with the government. When they want to inflict pain or send a message, they ‘drop some bodies’.¹³³ According to interview partners, gangs use the threat of violence to push politicians to pay attention to them, and at times ‘have them see a skeleton’ to remind them of their power.¹³⁴ They thus ensure they are not overlooked, and simultaneously underscore their ‘importance’ in their respective communities. As a Beetham resident explained:

*The only way how poor people get anything is by rebellion. By the time they [the politicians] see the rebellion, they have full respect for that.*¹³⁵

The violent potential of the groups in Trinidad is evidenced by a number of circumstances. One is the geographic location of their turf areas. The areas of Laventille, Beetham and Sealots that are controlled by gangs in Trinidad happen to be strategically located on the capital’s main artery: the main highway and bus priority route that leads in and out of Port of Spain. This East–West corridor connects the capital city with the international airport and the rest of the island to the east. It is of high importance for getting in and out of the capital city, and a roadblock could cut off the city from the rest of the country. A community police officer of the Hearts and Minds Unit pointed out:

What they [gangs] doing is not the ultimate for them, they just doing enough to show the government: 'I could give you more trouble than you could handle'. They could start shooting people in the traffic.¹³⁶

The Hearts and Minds police officers took me to an area called Beverly Hills in Laventille and pointed out the countless bullet holes in a building. The officers explained that a way gangs show their power is to terrorise the (rival) communities through random shootings. The intention is to let the other rival groups know what kind of weapons they have. Pistols, revolvers and shotguns are usually single-shot weapons and sound much different from semi-automatic rifles and sub-machine guns. Once a group gets hold of a new kind of weapon, they shoot it into the air or randomly into the rival community to show off their new assets. He claimed that it has become 'like a game for them' to show off their weapons by shooting into the air.¹³⁷

What happens is that they will go to one area and just shoot down into the rival area hoping that it would hit someone. [...] It's like a game for them. So when they do that, the other side will do the same thing. They are so far away, they can't see each other! Just firing into the community.¹³⁸

These shootings impact regular residents in the communities who are not involved in the ongoing gang war. The fear of becoming a victim of random shootings impacts the social life of Trinidadian citizens:

Gangsterism has now become a culture of the people! [...] now people can't go out so much again because at anytime people can start shooting without any notice. They start to shoot and who they shooting? At anybody they see!¹³⁹

For the public, many killings seem random, something which is terrifying for the local population. In Hobsbawm's vocabulary, gangs as avengers practice terror to successfully exert power. In May 2015 a man was shot from long range by a sniper for 'target practice', as the police assumed.¹⁴⁰ The indiscriminate violence has a distinct purpose for gangs fighting a war with rival gangs. Gangs in Trinidad either plan to kill a person of interest, or they plan to kill an innocent person. This means the killings of innocent persons are not as random as they seem. A community activist who has been working with youth in Laventille for decades and joined the Hearts and Minds Unit, a special community police unit formed to improve relationship between the police and the communities, explained:

They [gangs] don't do random. If they are coming to shoot you, they shooting you. If they are shooting innocent people, they are shooting innocent people. Whoever pick up, pick up.¹⁴¹

Interviewees stated a perverted logic behind the killings of innocent people. In these cases, the fatal violence against community members, such as mothers and children, is designed to hurt the whole community. The killing of a criminal or member of a gang wouldn't cause much pain in a community as everybody expected this to happen sooner or later, but the killing of an innocent person is a purposeful strategy to cause pain to a whole community.¹⁴²

And they purposefully kill innocent people because it creates terror in the community. Because of that they are not safe, not safe at all.¹⁴³

For instance, on New Year's Day (1 January) 2016, a 6-year-old boy and a 69-year-old woman were shot dead on the Beetham.¹⁴⁴ It was the start of a new wave of violence between the rival groups involving several murders, including the execution of two school boys (17 and 15 years old) who were dragged out of a taxi on their way home from school and shot on the spot in front of their friends and siblings.¹⁴⁵ Another example of gangs' terror is provided by the killing of Tecia Henry in 2009. The 10-year-old girl from John John in Laventille became a victim of the ongoing war between rival gangs when she went out to a shop but never returned. Later her body was found half naked, and the cause of death was determined to be strangulation. This was a turning point for the community, as after this incident the residents of John John stood up against the gang violence and proclaimed the 'Tecia Henry Order', which included a ceasefire. The Tecia Henry Order is prominently displayed on a billboard in John John and reads:

*Peace among all John John and neighbouring gangs. [...] Gang leaders must discipline their own members for the order to live. No child is to be used to do anything illegal or wrong. No child is to be kidnapped, hurt or murdered because of gang warfare. There must be absolutely no disrespecting of the elderly. Innocent residents must never become targets of gang rivalry. No violence against service providers, goods trucks and taxi drivers. There must be no house-breaking whatsoever. Raping is a violation of the Order, and must be dealt with seriously. Absolutely no violence during community activities. No brandishing of guns and injecting of fear into residents or visitors and if a misunderstanding occurs seek third-party help before war. We Live The Order.*¹⁴⁶

This pamphlet does not criticise gang rule in general, but appeals to the gang leaders to discipline their members. It spells out the terror that community members face, including abuse, the kidnapping and murder of children, rape and indiscriminate violence against innocent residents. This indicates that gangs resemble Hobsbawm's avenger, as gangs are 'public monsters' that exert power and remain heroes of the population despite their monstrosities, or because of them, as Hobsbawm argues.

Conclusion

Drawing on Hobsbawm's conceptualisation of avengers, this analysis has demonstrated that on the one hand, gangs in Trinidad and Tobago have taken over a prominent role as legitimate community actors. From the perspective of gang leaders and members, the gangs and their communities are the victims of inequality, elite corruption and capitalism. Unaccountable politicians, corrupt law enforcers and a weak justice system contribute to this perception. The rebellion formulated by the gang leaders interviewed here is reminiscent of Hobsbawm's peasant wars, yet is found in the midst of an urban setting. Gangs have grown into important service providers, a theoretical phenomenon explained by Hobsbawm's 'social bandits'. The interviews with gang leaders demonstrate their claim to be 'helping poor people and providing food for hungry people', through which they present themselves as Robin Hoods – or noble robbers, to use Hobsbawm's term. They act as the community protectors who defend the communities from outside threats; prosecute crimes; and provide food, money and clothes. The prosecution of crimes, including upholding 'sexual morality' by punishing rapists, can be linked to Hobsbawm's avengers.

On the other hand, gangs engage in high levels of violence, shootings and strategic killings to terrorise communities, regular citizens and politicians. They have access to high-power assault rifles and kill strategically or randomly, including children and regular citizens. Community members face abuse, the kidnapping and murder of children, rape and indiscriminate violence against innocent residents. By spreading violence and fear, the gangs have established a system of impunity, spurring the reproduction cycle of gangs. Most murders are not prosecuted due to a lack of evidence and a lack of witnesses. By acting as 'avengers', the gangs have managed to install a system of local support, impunity and power.

My findings support previous scholarly findings that gangs provide social welfare, protection and justice (e.g. Blake, Harriot and Jaffe on gangs in Jamaica,¹⁴⁷ Stephenson in Russia,¹⁴⁸ McDonalds and Wilson in Indonesia,¹⁴⁹ or Gutiérrez Rivera in Honduras¹⁵⁰). Scholars argue that gangs' social behaviour grants them authority, respect and community support. Yet my findings show that it is not the positive aspect of gangs itself, but in combination with the spread of terror and fear that puts community members into a gridlock of compliance. The characteristics of Hobsbawm's 'avengers' provide a basis for thinking about the relationship of bandits to the community they reign in. It contributes to a better understanding of the contemporary modalities of urban violence and his figure of the avenger is very helps unpacking and characterise the ambiguity of the relationship between gangs and local communities. Rather than seeing (urban) violence as an indicator of a state's inability to address issues of poverty, racism and exclusion, and link the benevolent attitude of gangs to a lack of state presence or inadequate state capacity, the concept of the avenger allows us to explain why the phenomenon of gangs is persistent over time. Viewing the ambiguity of gangs as part of the processes of socialisation of young men into crime is central to understanding why gangs persist. These findings support the assumption that repressive responses to gang violence are likely to be ineffective or counterproductive, as it neglects that gangs are more than a 'crime problem', but social actors providing for the community who are helped, supported and admired by many. It is a mechanism in which gangs manage to pull community member on the side of the 'outlaws' and become complicit with them. Instead of viewing gang members as pathological criminals, Hobsbawm's avenger helps to understand crime as a form of social protest and underclass revolt and thus offer valuable insights into the workings of politics, gangs and local communities. At the same time, the concept of avengers is less romanticising and idolising than Hobsbawm's Robin Hood, as it points out to the brutality, terror and fear gang build their power on. This understanding supports the view not to underestimate the power of gangs.

Moreover, empirical evidence from Trinidad and Tobago shows that Hobsbawm's concepts are more contemporary than the critical literature suggests. Yet to make Hobsbawm's 1969 work applicable in the early twenty-first century, one has to indulge in conceptual cherry-picking. The empirical findings presented here match what Hobsbawm framed as social bandits and avengers; however, in Hobsbawm's understanding, social banditry was a rural phenomenon limited to peasant outlaws. It excluded urban terrorism and gangs. If we put Hobsbawm's lords, peasants, and countless examples of nineteenth-century bandits aside, we see that social bandits are indeed applicable to contemporary findings. If there has been a rural-urban shift of

violence¹⁵¹ and a transformation of gangs from economically driven criminal collectives to social actors and legitimised community leaders,¹⁵² then the low-income urban working class is the new peasantry, and the gangs their peasant outlaws.

Notes

1. Baird, 'Becoming the "Baddest"'.
2. Hagedorn, *A World of Gangs*, xxiv.
3. Arias, *Criminal Enterprises*; Blake, 'Shadowing the State'; Gutiérrez Rivera, *Territories of Violence*; Hensell, 'Banden und Gangs in Albanien'; Jaffe, 'Criminal Dons'; McDonald and Wilson, 'Trouble in Paradise'; Munroe and Blake, 'Governance and Disorder'; Rodgers, 'The State as a Gang'; Stephenson, *Gangs of Russia*.
4. Jaffe, 'Criminal Dons', 193.
5. Rodgers, 'The State as a Gang', 317.
6. Arias, *Criminal Enterprises*, 2.
7. Hagedorn, *A World of Gangs*, xxxi.
8. Hensell, 'Banden und Gangs in Albanien', 184.
9. Siegelberg and Hensell, 'Rebellen, Warlords und Milizen', 32.
10. Rodgers, 'The State as a Gang', 319.
11. Blake, 'Shadowing the State', 67.
12. Brotherton and Barrios, *Almighty Latin King*, 42.
13. I use the term gang following the Eurogang definition which includes the following characteristics as a basis of a gang: (1) durability or a group; (2) a street-oriented lifestyle; (3) youthfulness; (4) illegal activity; (5) group identity. The definition is 'a street gang (or troublesome youth group corresponding to a street gang elsewhere) is any durable, street-oriented youth group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of its group identity' (Esbensen and Maxson, *Youth Gangs in International Perspective*). In Trinidad and Tobago, the groups are commonly referred to as 'gangs' and their leaders as 'gang leaders' by the general public, the media and the police, but not by themselves. Leaders of gangs call themselves community leaders. They have clearly defined leaders and a membership hierarchy. The name of their group corresponds to the name of the neighbourhood, street or block they operate in. Their strong group identity is evidenced by, for instance, signs, symbols, colours, flags, graffiti, and jewellery and clothing style. They meet regularly, get involved in violent incidents, mostly shootings, and are involved in criminal activities (such as drug sales, drug trafficking, and robberies). Additionally, they are illegalized by the Anti Gang Act of 2011 (Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, *Anti-Gang Act. No 1*).
14. World Bank, 'Intentional Homicides'.
15. Ibid.
16. Maguire et al., 'Spatial Concentrations of Violence', 6.
17. Jütersonke et al., 'Gangs, Urban Violence'.
18. Manwaring, *Street Gangs*.
19. Sullivan, 'Maras Morphing'.
20. Fernandes, 'Youth Gang Members'.
21. Cruz, 'Maras and the Politics'; Gutiérrez Rivera, 'Discipline and Punish?'; Jütersonke et al., 'Gangs, Urban Violence'; Pérez, 'Gang Violence and Insecurity'.
22. Dichiarà and Chabot, 'Gangs and the Contemporary'; Hagedorn, *A World of Gangs*; Jütersonke et al., 'Gangs, Urban Violence'; Hazen and Rodgers, *Global Gangs*; Hume, 'Kill Them, Attack Them'.
23. Dichiarà and Chabot, 'Gangs and the Contemporary', 77–78.
24. Ibid.

25. Blok, 'The Peasant and the Brigand'; Cartlidge, 'Robin Hood's Rules'; Cronin, 'Noble Robbers, Avengers and Entrepreneurs'; Fraser, *Gangs & Crime*; Rodgers, 'The Moral Economy of Murder'; Slatta, *Bandidos*.
26. Cartlidge, 'Robin Hood's Rules'.
27. Gutiérrez Rivera, 'Discipline and Punish?'.
28. Baird, 'Becoming the "Baddest"'.
29. McIlwaine and Moser, 'Living in Fear'.
30. Muggah and Aguirre Tobón, 'Citizen Security in Latin America', 1.
31. Rodgers and Baird, 'Understanding Gangs', 490.
32. Jütersonke et al., 'Gangs, Urban Violence', 391.
33. Griffin and Persad, "'Dons", So-Called "Community Leaders"', 86.
34. Ibid.
35. Davis, 'Non-State Armed Actors', 226.
36. Harriott, 'The Emergence and Evolution'.
37. Jaffe, 'Criminal Dons', 189.
38. Ibid.
39. Munroe and Blake, 'Governance and Disorder', 584.
40. Blake, 'Shadowing the State'.
41. Jaffe, 'Criminal Dons', 193.
42. Stephenson, *Gangs of Russia*, 153.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid., 154.
45. Ibid., 156.
46. McDonald and Wilson, 'Trouble in Paradise', 250.
47. Ibid., 253.
48. McIlwaine and Moser, 'Living in Fear', 130.
49. Gutiérrez Rivera, *Territories of Violence*, 78.
50. Rodgers, 'The State as a Gang', 319.
51. Blake, 'Shadowing the State', 67.
52. Hensell, 'Banden und Gangs in Albanien'.
53. Siegelberg and Hensell, 'Rebellen, Warlords und Milizen', 32.
54. Blake, 'Shadowing the State', 57.
55. Blake, 'Shadowing the State'.
56. Gutiérrez Rivera, *Territories of Violence*, 79.
57. Cronin, 'Noble Robbers, Avengers and Entrepreneurs', 845.
58. Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 7.
59. Ibid., 20.
60. Ibid., 12.
61. Ibid., 48–49.
62. Ibid., 48–49.
63. Ibid., 47.
64. Ibid., 48–49.
65. As cited in Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 64.
66. Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 63.
67. Ibid., 63–64.
68. Ibid., 69.
69. Ibid., 67.
70. Arias, *Criminal Enterprises*, 2.
71. Hagedorn, *A World of Gangs*, xxx–xxxi.
72. Cronin, 'Noble Robbers, Avengers and Entrepreneurs'.
73. Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 20.
74. Ibid., 34.
75. Brotherton, *Youth Street Gangs*, 26.
76. Yin, *Case Study Research*, 1–2.

77. Pawelz, 'Researching Gangs'.
78. Lee, *Dangerous Fieldwork*; Nilan, 'Dangerous Fieldwork Re-Examined'.
79. Lee-Treweek and Linkogle, *Danger in the Field*.
80. Belousov et al., 'Any Port in a Storm'.
81. For more details on my methodological approach and fieldwork, see: Pawelz, 'Researching Gangs'.
82. Interview with resident, Nelson Street, East Port of Spain, 14 April 2015.
83. Neil, *Voices From The Hills*.
84. Mahabir, 'Allah's Outlaws', 2.
85. Interview with gang member, Laventille, Trinidad, 23 May 2015.
86. Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 47.
87. Interview with gang leader, Laventille, Trinidad, 3 June 2015.
88. Ibid.
89. Interview with gang leader, Beetham Gardens, Trinidad, 3 June 2015.
90. Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 34.
91. Interview with gang leader, Beetham Gardens, Trinidad, 3 June 2015.
92. Interview with gang member, Laventille, Trinidad, 23 May 2015.
93. Interview with gang leader, Laventille, Trinidad, 3 June 2015.
94. Interview with gang leader, Beetham Gardens, Trinidad, 3 June 2015.
95. Ibid.
96. Interview with gang leader, St. Barbs, Trinidad, 14 May 2015.
97. Ibid.
98. Interview with resident, Beetham Gardens, Trinidad, 8 June 2015.
99. Interview with gang member, Laventille, Trinidad, 23 May 2015.
100. Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 69.
101. Interview with gang affiliate/rapper, Desperlie Crescent, Laventille, Trinidad, 23 May 2015.
102. Ibid.
103. Interview with resident, Nelson Street, East Port of Spain, 14 April 2015.
104. Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 47.
105. Interview with gang leader, Laventille, Trinidad, 18 June 2015.
106. Interview with resident, Nelson Street, East Port of Spain, 14 April 2015.
107. Interview with gang leader, Laventille, Trinidad, 18 June 2015.
108. Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 67.
109. Interview with resident, Duncan Street, East Port of Spain, Trinidad, 25 May 2015.
110. Interview with social worker, Citizen Security Programme, St. James, Trinidad, 20 May 2015.
111. Interview with gang leader, Laventille, Trinidad, 3 June 2015.
112. Ibid.
113. Interview with resident, Beetham Gardens, Trinidad, 8 June 2015.
114. Interview with gang leader, Laventille, Trinidad, 18 June 2015.
115. Interview with resident/mother, Beetham Gardens, Trinidad, 5 June 2015.
116. Interview with resident, Beetham Gardens, Trinidad, 8 June 2015.
117. Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 69.
118. Interview with community activist, IATF (Inter-Agency Task Force), Hearts and Minds Unit, El Socorro, Trinidad, 15 April 2015.
119. Ibid.
120. Interview with former gang member, St. James, Port of Spain, Trinidad, 12 May 2015.
121. Interview with resident, Duncan Street, East Port of Spain, Trinidad, 25 May 2015; and interview with gang member, Laventille, Trinidad, 23 May 2015.
122. Interview with resident, Duncan Street, East Port of Spain, Trinidad, 25 May 2015.
123. Ibid.
124. Interview with resident, Beetham Gardens, Trinidad, 8 June 2015.
125. Interview with resident/mother, Beetham Gardens, Trinidad, 5 June 2015.
126. Interview with resident, Duncan Street, East Port of Spain, Trinidad, 25 May 2015.

127. Commission of Enquiry, 'Report of the Commission', 1146.
128. Interview with police officer, IATF (Inter-Agency Task Force), Hearts and Minds Unit, El Socorro, Trinidad, 13 May 2015.
129. Interview with resident, Beetham Gardens, Trinidad, 8 June 2015.
130. Interview with police officer, Besson Street police station, Laventille, Trinidad, 24 April 2015.
131. Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 63.
132. Interview with pastor, Protestant church, Maraval, Port of Spain, 4 May 2015.
133. Interview with community activist, IATF (Inter-Agency Task Force), Hearts and Minds Unit, El Socorro, Trinidad, 15 April 2015.
134. Interview with resident, Beetham Gardens, Trinidad, 8 June 2015.
135. Ibid.
136. Interview with police officer, IATF (Inter-Agency Task Force), Hearts and Minds Unit, El Socorro, Trinidad, 15 April 2015.
137. Interview with officer, Criminal Gang Intelligence Unit (CGIU), St. James, Port of Spain, Trinidad, 1 May 2015.
138. Interview with officer, Criminal Gang Intelligence Unit (CGIU), St. James, Port of Spain, Trinidad, 1 May 2015.
139. Interview with resident, Duncan Street, East Port of Spain, Trinidad, 25 May 2015.
140. Trinidad and Tobago Newsday, 'Sniper's Bullet Cuts Man down'.
141. Interview with community activist, IATF (Inter-Agency Task Force), Hearts and Minds Unit, El Socorro, Trinidad, 15 April 2015.
142. Ibid.
143. Interview with police officer, IATF (Inter-Agency Task Force), Hearts and Minds Unit, El Socorro, Trinidad 15 April 2015.
144. Trinidad and Tobago Newsday, 'Beetham Warns of Action'.
145. Trinidad and Tobago Guardian, 'Schoolboys Slaughtered'.
146. Billboard in John John, Laventille.
147. Harriott, 'The Emergence and Evolution'; Jaffe, 'Criminal Dons'; Munroe and Blake, 'Governance and Disorder'.
148. Stephenson, *Gangs of Russia*.
149. McDonald and Wilson, 'Trouble in Paradise'.
150. Gutiérrez Rivera, *Territories of Violence*.
151. Rodgers, 'Slum Wars'.
152. Brotherton, *Youth Street Gangs*; Hagedorn, 'The Global Impact'.

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